

# RISK APPRAISAL – RISK SA1R

**To provide officers with guidance on the assessment of risks related to a failure to improve trunk route (i.e. the A1 and East Coast Mainline) connections to and from Berwick-upon-Tweed.**

**Recommendation:**

1. Council is invited to provide guidance to officers as to the assessment to be made of the risk to the community of a failure to improve trunk transport links.

	Yes	No
Does the decision involve new expenditure?		No
Is there an existing budget for the proposed expenditure (insert code)	N/A	
What procurement level is required?	N/A	
Are there equalities impacts / an equalities assessment required?		No
Does this require a full council decision? (Reports for full council decision should still be sent to the relevant committee where possible.)	Yes	
Is there a background paper or papers? (provide links below).		No

1. Council has, over a number of years, supported improved trunk links between Berwick and the two major employment zones adjacent to it (Edinburgh and the Tyneside conurbation) as part of an economic plan intended to address issues of low wages and under-employment in the town.
2. The isochronic challenges are real and include both the base level challenges of inadequate roads and a lack of rail capacity, and the secondary challenges of a lack of regular services (rail) and a lack of resilience (road).
3. One solution that has been envisaged for many years is the completion of the dualling of the A1 from Morpeth to Berwick-upon-Tweed. Currently the road is single carriageway from north of Morpeth to the beginning of the Alnwick bypasses, and from north of Alnwick to Berwick with the exception of a small section of dual carriageway around South Charlton.
4. In autumn 2014 the government announced the first Road Investment Strategy, which included a £290million package for Highways England to improve the A1 in Northumberland. The A1 in Northumberland programme of improvements included completing the dual carriageway between Morpeth and Alnwick, and between Alnwick and Ellingham, with associated junction improvements.
5. Three schemes then proceeded through consultation to the selection of preferred routes and the timetabling of work. The commitment to improve the A1 north of Newcastle was explicitly restated in the Road Investment Strategy 2, issued in 2020 (pp 72-3). This has led to an expectation that the decision to improve the A1 had been agreed in principle.
6. Separately, however, the government commissioned a piece of work known as the Union Connectivity Review, led by Sir Peter Hendy, the Chair of Network Rail. The policy base of the Hendy review is not clear, and is not easy to align with the government’s commitment to levelling up; at page 56 of the Analytical Review published alongside the main report the Hendy team say “While cross-border travel between Scotland and England is of critical strategic importance for the connectivity of the UK, the Scottish/English Borderlands region does not have the density of economic activity or quantity of local cross-border commuting flows to be considered a strategic cross-border economic region.” The reliance in other places in the report on the work of Centre for Cities, and other supporters of urban agglomeration theory (which is, in essence, the opposite of levelling up) suggests that the Hendy review was starting from a particular, and specific, ideological position.
7. The Hendy analytical review asserts at p.116 that the A1 improvements are unlikely to deliver value for money, and that a full multi modal assessment should be undertaken.

This led the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP to make a statement to the House of Commons on 26 May 2022 saying “Several of the Union Connectivity Review recommendations concern ongoing projects, which may be impacted by the Union Connectivity Review response. The [A1 Morpeth to Ellingham scheme](#) is one such case, as it relates to Sir Peter’s recommendation for a multimodal study of the East Coast Corridor to identify the best opportunities for improvement.” That extension has been further extended by a recent statement to the House of Commons on behalf of the Secretary of State by Huw Merriman MP.

**Issues arising from proposal**

Officers are concerned that an over-dependence on agglomeration theory and on the assumptions made in the Hendy report will lead to schemes in areas like North Northumberland being unlikely to be prioritized. This in turn will lead to further population pressure in Berwick as the number of economically active residents stagnates or declines.

Officers are also concerned that they should not publicly object, even if the situation seems unfair or perverse (as in this case, where a scheme that has been in development for at least eight years is held back because of a review not even imagined when the scheme was first envisaged) for fear of jeopardizing relationships with local politicians or representatives. In essence, officers will not make public comment without being sure that their views are congruent with those of council.

Officers further require guidance as to whether, as an alternative strategy, councillors should seek a growth strategy for the area of North Northumberland, and specifically for Berwick-upon-Tweed, in order to improve the chances of attracting inward investment and changing the value for money calculations around schemes such as improving the A1 or railway capacity. In essence, this means adopting an element of agglomeration theory by seeking to develop Berwick as a service point and accommodation for individuals who work in, or do business in, Edinburgh and Tyneside, relieving some of the pressure for growth in those places. This strategy also has associated risks, not least around the housing strategy and housing needs calculations prepared in association with the Local Plan.

**Rationale for recommendation.**

Not applicable.